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Second Skin:

From Perspectives of Postmodernism and Feminism

后现代主义和女性主义视角下的《第二层皮》

杨湘齐

指导教师姓名: 詹树魁 教授

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Synopsis

With his outstanding originality in the artistic skills and creative thoughts, John Hawkes has established his statue in the history of the post-World War II American literature as one of the most distinguished experimental novelist. Though his works are often criticized as unnecessarily obscure, it should be noted that John Hawkes is a passionate artist devoting himself into experimental creativity. He intends to create a new world instead of representing one. He challenges the established representation of realism and aggressively pursues the nightmarish, the comic, the disruptive and the irrational. With his delightful violation of a reader's conventional trust, Hawkes creates his own trademark of his fictions throughout his career---the paradoxical mixture of comedy and terror. His keenly-felt nightmarish consciousness, comic treatment of violence and the subtle artistic techniques make him independent in the postmodernist writing. It is his unique originality that enriches the nightmarish overtones of the novels and gives them their poetic quality. In this sense, John Hawkes makes himself a leading figure in the postwar American novelists.

Second Skin, a masterpiece of postmodernist writing, is the fiction which materializes his creative concepts and his subtle artistic skills. The novel is the protagonist---Skipper's flesh-out psychical journey of the imaginative reconstruction of his past. Using his lyrical language and humor to triumph over death and evil, Skipper not only survives in the imposition of chaos but also creates a new life with the power inside---imagination and dignity. In this novel, the reader could see clearly Hawkes' refusal to recognize, or abide the rational consciousness in his fondness for delicately withholding narrative information and in his habit of shuffling ordered events in time. Structure in this novel is based upon the cross-references, parallels and contrasts rather than the development of plot and character, the irrelative fragments of recollection replace the plots, the psychological narration in the trace of hummingbird

substitutes for the detailed depiction of the characters, and the multiple themes are deeply embedded in the seeming unconcerned narration.

It should be stressed that with *Second Skin*, Hawkes shifts from the darkly Gothic to a more comic and absurd treatment of the world by endowing Skipper with the clownish spirit to confront the absurdity of the world. Hawkes challenges the reader to wade into the black waters of the violent, the comic, and the repressive in Skipper's world, to sift through painful and regretful elements embedded in the past, to confront death and to create hope for the future. In addition, the author shows his great sympathy for the women and craftily leaks the feminine voices from the totalizing imagination of the first-person male narrator, exposing how the males portray women as objects of their desires and impose the silence on the women.

Trying to get a panorama idea of the artistic presentation from viewpoints of postmodernism and feminism, this thesis tends to advance the discussion in four chapters besides Introduction" and "Conclusion". Chapter One, "The Nightmarish World", introduces the social thought background of the novel, analyzes the features of the characters in postmodernist novels, and points out the theme that the war causes the absurd society as well as the corrupt humanity. Chapter Two, "The Comic Tragedy", from the viewpoint of Black Humor, analyzes John Hawkes' artistic way by daringly mixing horror with humor and the grotesque with the heroic. Representing all the features of anti-hero in Black Humor, the protagonist actively chooses his role as a comic clown and a fighting hero to create his own way for counteracting and redeeming the evil and despair with smiling bitterness. The joyful new life on the Wandering Island further confirms Skipper's strength and grace in transcending death and cruelty. Chapter Three, "The Postmodernist Techniques", analyzes the author's distinguished and artistic treatments in the novel: his extreme shuffle of time and space, his exploration of all the possibilities of first-person narration, the phantasmagoric symbolic codes, the parody of the traditional mythology, and the technique of metafiction. Chapter Four, "The Second Sex", turns to cope with the relationship between Skipper and three major female

characters. From the viewpoint of feminist, it points out how the male narrator “fathers” his text to claim his triumph of creating a patriarchy world as well as constructing a silent world for all the women, and illuminates the real world of the fighting women through the struggle of these three female characters. Finally, the “Conclusion” briefly summarizes the artistic values of *Second Skin* and gives the further explanation for the seeming obscurity of the novel. In a word, interested in pursuing the nightmare, in assaulting the conventional world, and in creating his unique aesthetic techniques, Hawkes lays himself out in *Second Skin* to testify his outstanding artistic innovation and makes this novel an extraordinary acquisition to the literary world.

Key words: *Second Skin*, postmodernism; feminism; artistic techniques

摘 要

作为一名杰出的实验性后现代主义作家，约翰·霍克斯凭借其出色的艺术技巧和独特的创作理念确立了自己在二战后美国文学史上的重要地位。尽管一些人常常批评他的作品晦涩难懂，但应当注意的是，他是一名致力于实验创作的激情艺术家——他要创造一个世界，而不是要表现一个世界。他勇于挑战传统的现实主义表现形式，不懈地创造一个梦魇、悲喜剧、断裂和非理性的世界。他不断打破读者的惯性依赖心理，终其一生创造了他的小说的标志——喜剧与恐惧的融合。他强烈的梦魇意识、对暴力的喜剧处理以及精湛的艺术技巧使其在后现代主义写作中独树一帜。正是他独特的原创性进一步加深了他作品中的梦魇色彩，赋予作品诗一般的品质。从这种意义上说，约翰·霍克斯是战后美国小说家中的杰出代表。

作为一本后现代主义写作的经典之作，《第二层皮》突出地体现了作者的创作理念和精湛的艺术技巧。该小说是关于主人公——一名前海军船长如何通过想象和回忆对自身的过去进行重新建构的心理历程。通过他诗一般的语言和幽默战胜死亡和邪恶，船长不仅在乱世中生存下来，而且应用内在的力量——想象和尊严建立了一种新的生活。在小说中，作者通过对叙述信息巧妙的隐藏以及对事件时序的错乱安排，向读者清晰表明了他对理性意识的拒绝认同。小说中的叙事结构时而跳跃、中断，时而交叉、平行，全然不依赖于情节和人物的发展，梦魇般的心理叙述代替了人物刻画，而多重主题却深深地编织在漫不经心的叙述当中。

值得一提的是，从《第二层皮》开始，霍克斯赋予主人公小丑的特质来应对世界的荒诞，从而从黑暗的哥特式的表现形式转向更喜剧、更荒诞的艺术表现。霍克斯将读者领入船长充满暴力、喜剧和压抑的黑暗世界，挖掘深藏在过去的痛苦与悔恨，与主人公一起在面对死亡威胁的同时创造对未来的憧憬。此外，作者在小说中表现出对女性的深切同情，并巧妙的从第一人称的男性叙述中泄漏出女性的声音，暴露出男性如何强加静音于女性并力图将女性物化为自己的欲望。

本文从后现代主义和女性主义角度出发，试图勾画出这部作品中的艺术表现

手法。导言开篇介绍了《第二层皮》的创作背景，以及它在美国文学界取得的成功。第一章主要介绍小说的社会思潮背景，分析了后现代主义小说人物塑造的特点，并指出战争是这个荒诞社会 and 人性腐堕的起因。第二章从黑色幽默的表现手法入手，分析作者将恐惧与幽默，怪诞与英勇相结合的艺术表现方式，赋予主人公黑色幽默中作为反英雄的主要特征。主人公主动选择喜剧小丑与战斗英雄的双重角色，在苦涩的微笑中对抗邪恶与绝望，实行自我救赎。第三章分析了作者杰出的艺术技巧，如极其纷乱的时空、对第一人称叙事新的探索、不确定的象征寓意、戏仿以及元小说等。第四章从船长与三位主要女性角色的关系入手，从女性主义角度出发，分析男性叙述者如何构建一个女性的静音世界来宣称男权世界的胜利，并通过女性的挣扎和反抗展现出真实的女性声音。结语部分简要总结了《第二层皮》的文学艺术价值，同时对该小说晦涩难懂的原因给予了解释。简言之，在不断的追求梦魇、打破传统世界、创造自己独到的艺术技巧的过程中，霍克斯以《第二层皮》充分展现了他杰出的艺术创新，并使该作品成为美国文学史上一部非凡的作品。

关键字：《第二层皮》；后现代主义；女性主义；艺术技巧

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Introduction

John Hawkes, novelist, playwright, poet and critic, is regarded as one of the most original and uncompromising artists of the post-World War II generation of writers. As a distinguished experimental novelist, Hawkes challenges the established representation of realism and aggressively pursues the nightmarish, the comic, the disruptive and the irrational. He talks about his artistic vision: “fiction should achieve revenge for all the indignities of our childhood,” and “should destroy conventional morality” (qtd. in Marx 29). He concludes that “the act of writing is criminal” (qtd. in Marx 29). Hawkes poses his primary interest in the psychic and imaginative processes of human beings and describes his fiction as travels through the landscape of the psyche. He emphasizes the brutal and absurdly comic aspects in order to draw the compassion. As a result, his work is difficult and demanding, full of connotations intended to startle and repel the reader. With his works often criticized as unnecessarily obscure, Hawkes intends to create a new world instead of representing one, and *Second Skin* is the novel materializing all his concepts of fiction.

Born to John Clendennin Burne Hawkes and Helen Ziefle Hawkes in Stamford, Connecticut, on 17 August 1925, John Clendennin Burne Hawkes Jr., an asthmatic child, spent his first eight years in New England. In 1935, Hawkes and his mother joined his father in Juneau, Alaska, where the family spent five years. They moved back to New York in 1940. In 1943, Hawkes entered Harvard University and began writing poetry. After a disappointing semester, he left Harvard to serve as an American Field Service ambulance driver in Italy and Germany in 1944-1945. Such experience often shaped the war settings of his fictions. Following his return to Harvard in 1945, he met his wife Sophie Goode Tazewell and was admitted to Albert J. Guerard’s creative writing class with his first fiction “*The Cannibal*” (1949). Guerard appreciated Hawkes’ talents and introduced him to James Laughlin, the publisher of New

Directions. As Hawkes recalled his luck in an interview with Patrick O'Donnell:

So that my life, mentor-teacher, and mentor-publisher all came together at that precise moment in my life when I was twenty-two or twenty-three. If I thought my childhood and adolescence weren't very inspiring or happy, certainly by the time of my early manhood I really had a direction that was extremely well defined. (O'Donnell "Life and Art: An interview with John Hawkes")¹

Under Guerard's mentorship, Laughlin's and his wife's support, Hawkes began his formal writing career.

In 1949, Hawkes graduated from Harvard. He worked at the university press, taught briefly at Harvard and began teaching writing at Brown University in 1958 till his retirement in 1988. Throughout this time, he and his wife lived in Providence, Rhode Island, raised four children, and traveled abroad with his family. During his career, he published sixteen novels, a volume of plays, and two collections of fiction. Over the years he received many honors. He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1973, he received Le Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger, one of the most distinguished French literary prizes for *The Blood Oranges* (1971); in 1986 he was awarded the Prix Medicis Etranger for the best foreign novel translated into French for *Adventures in the Alaskan Skin Trade* (1985). *Second Skin* became Hawkes's most celebrated novel and was the runner-up to Saul Bellow's *Herzog* (1964) for the National Book Award with one vote. During 1970s, the publication of his triad [the *Blood Oranges*, *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* (1974), and *Travesty* (1976)] firmly established him in the avant-garde tradition and gained some of his best reviews. Thomas McGuane called Hawkes "feasible our best writer" (qtd in MacCurdy "John Hawkes")², and Tonny Tanner called him "one of the very best living American

¹ O'Donnell, Patrick. "Life and Art: An Interview with John Hawkes". Centre for Book Culture Web Site. <<http://www.centerforbookculture.org/interviews/interview-hawkes.html>>. Subsequent quotation in the same work will be marked with the author's name only.

² MacCurdy, Carol. "John Hawkes". The Gale Group. <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/galenet/lite/John/index.htm>. Subsequent quotation in the same work will be marked with the author's name only.

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